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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 SANAA 000694

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA, NEA/ARP, NEA/PD, NEA/RA, DS/OP/NEA AND S/CT

CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE ASSASSINATION OF HAMAS LEADER AHMAD YASSIN.

REF: SANAA 468

1. SUMMARY: The assassination of Ahmad Yassin 3/22, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, received widespread reaction at various levels of Yemeni society including the government, political parties and the media. Newspapers, including government, opposition and independent papers, published extensive coverage of the incident and statements of condemnation by the government and by political parties. Yemen TV and opposition statements commented the same day on the assassination saying that the weak Arab presence in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the U.S. Administration backing for Israel were responsible for the assassination. Statements supported resistance and argued that the Israeli policies are blocking any chances for peace. A statement by the Committee of Yemeni Scholars (Ulama) held the U.S. responsible for the assassination and described it as "Israel's number one supporter." All media outlets covered as well a demonstration in Sana'a 03/23 in which over 70 thousand people participated. President Ali Abdallah Saleh addressed the demonstration expressing support to all Palestinian factions and demanding that the "terrorist Sharon" should be tried before the International Criminal Court as a war criminal. Overall, the media condemned the act, and held the U.S. Administration responsible for the "Israeli terrorist attacks against the Palestinians." END SUMMARY

2. Yemen TV broadcast two-hour coverage 3/22 on the Yassin assassination. The broadcast commented, "such consequences are a result of the U.S. backing for Israel." Yemen TV blamed the U.S. for its "shy" reaction to the assassination. It also broadcast coverage of a protest organized by the Students Federation at Sana'a University. Reportedly thousands of students and some University professors took part in the demonstration. Anti-Israeli and anti-American slogans were chanted during the protest.

3. Al-Sahwa Net, web site of Islah's Al-Sahwa weekly, (03/22), published a statement by the major opposition party in Yemen, the Yemeni Alliance for Reform (Islah), condemning the assassination. The statement holds Israel and the U.S. Administration responsible for the assassination and for any consequences that may occur. It also published separate statements by the opposition alliance, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the ruling General People's Congress and the Yemeni Socialist Party. The JMP statement holds the Arab regimes responsible for developments in Palestine "due to their silence to the previous Israeli threats to assassinate Sheikh Ahmad Yassin over the past months." The statement called on the international community to shoulder its legal, humanitarian and political responsibilities "toward the acts of terror being committed in Palestine with U.S. collusion."

4. The statement by the Yemeni Socialist Party stressed that "the assassination will only ignite conflicts and reduce chances for peaceful solutions in the region and which have already been obstructed by the right-wing government of Sharon." The ruling General People's Congress party stressed in its statement that the Yemeni attitude is firm in supporting the Palestinians "in their legitimate and fair struggle to restore their rights and establish the independent state of Palestine on their national soil." The statement called on the international community "to interfere and stop the Israeli massacres; to try Sharon as a war criminal; to impose strict sanctions on the Sharon government; and to take the initiative to achieve peace in the Middle East region."

5. Al-Sahwa Net (03/22) reported that a parliamentary delegation visited the Hamas office in Sana'a and offered condolences over the death of Yassin. Al-Sahwa Net quoted the Hamas representative in Yemen, Jamal Eissa, who called on the people of Yemen to attend a ceremony in solidarity with Palestine next Thursday, 3/24 in Sana'a.

6. Al-Thawra official daily (03/23) quoted an unnamed Yemeni government source who condemned in strongly worded

terms the "criminal act committed by the Sharon government." "This cowardly, dangerous and terrorist Israeli criminal act," the source added, "is a new affirmation of the state terrorism being practiced by Israel and its Prime Minister Sharon against the Palestinian people, and is a hindrance to all international efforts that aim to establish a fair and comprehensive solution to the Israeli/Arab conflict." The source said that the assassination "will only lead to more violence and resistance." It demanded on behalf of the government of Yemen that the U.N. and the Quartet "condemn this heinous and horrible crime and to put a limit to the Israeli terror policies." The source urged the U.N. Security Council to send international protection forces to protect the Palestinians "and to prevent the situation from deteriorating further." "This Israeli escalation" the source emphasized "is a natural result of the international community's neglect to the destructive and extremist Israeli policies." The source demanded from the international community to impose sanctions on the Israeli government and try Sharon as a war criminal.

17. Al-Thawra (03/23) also published two separate statements by the Parliament and the Shura Council strongly condemning the assassination. The statement urged all levels of the Palestinian society, including political leaders and resistance factions, "to unite and strengthen resistance by all possible means available." The Parliament called on Arab and Muslim leaders to "offer all types of moral and material support to the Palestinian people to help them continue the resistance and liberate Palestine." The statement requested from the Arab and Muslim countries that have "direct or indirect" relations with Israel "to reconsider such relations." The Parliament holds the U.S. Administration "fully responsible for the acts of terror being committed by the Zionist entity against the Palestinians." It called on the international community and the Security Council "to take a serious position toward Zionist terrorism and to prove the credibility of its war against terrorism." Al-Thawra also quoted the Foreign Relations Committee in Parliament, which said that "any peace efforts with Sharon and bloodsuckers in his government will never see light." "Resistance and Jihad" the FRC added "is the only option that all Arab and Muslim populations have to confront the powers of evil which enjoy the support of the U.S. Administration." The Shura Council statement said that the Council received the news "with great sorrow and anger." It said, "all Israel's peace theories are maneuvers to gain more time to implement its hidden desires to eliminate and expel the rest of the Palestinians from Palestine." The statement confirmed that the assassination is not targeted against Hamas, "but against all the Arab and Muslim populations." Al-Thawra quoted Speaker of Parliament Shaikh Al-Ahmar who described the assassination as an "unforgivable act." He called on the U.S. government to "prove its credibility and stand by its responsibilities as a peace sponsor to stop the Zionist crimes." He also called on the U.S. to "stop supporting Israel with weapons and money and to stop defending it in all international events." Al-Thawra also quoted the Hamas representative in Sana'a who said that the assassination will make Hamas stronger and more determined to resist the Israeli occupation.

18. Al-Thawra (03/23) published an op-ed titled "What is After the Assassination?" The article indicated that strong statements of condemnation and negotiations with Israel will not stop Israel since Israel "is looking forward to eliminating all the Arabs." "Israel will not change its policies and terrorist plans unless the Arabs move toward solidarity and take practical decisions" Al-Thawra added. The paper published another op-ed which said that "the peace process has been buried the day Sheikh Ahmad Yassin was killed."

19. Aden-based independent daily Al-Ayyam (03/23) published extensive coverage of the assassination. On the front-page, a very provoking photo of Sheikh Yassin in the morgue with his brain scattered was printed. The paper highlighted regional and international reactions to the assassination.

10. All news websites including the government's official web site Saba News Agency; the Al-Motamar Net (web site run by the ruling General People's Congress); the Al-Sahwa Net (web site of Islah's Al-Sahwa weekly); the independent Al-Tagheer Net; and the Al-Wahdawi Net reported that a "massive" demonstration took place in Sana'a today 3/23. Seventy thousand people were reported by newspapers to have taken part in the demonstration. The demonstrators handed a letter to the U.N. Representative in Sana'a requesting the U.N. to interfere immediately "to stop the Israeli massacres and try Sharon." Banners were raised during the demonstration calling on the people to boycott U.S. and Israeli products and calling on the Arab states "to open the door for the Arab youth to go on jihad and not to naturalize relations with Israel." The demonstration was attended by the President of the Republic who delivered a speech condemning the assassination of Yassin. President Saleh

requested the U.N. and the international community to try Sharon before the International Criminal Court as a war criminal. He described Sharon as "the world's number one terrorist" and that "no terrorism in the world equals Sharon's." The President considered the assassination of Yassin as a "challenge to the upcoming Arab League summit." He said that the Palestinians are suffering from the Israeli intransigence "due to the absence of Arab solidarity." "This is the first message to the Arab nation" the President added "and the second will be to kill Yasser Arafat." The President voiced Yemen's support "with all its capabilities" to all resistance factions including Fath, Hamas, Jihad and the Public Resistance Movement. The President called on all the Palestinian factions to "unite and confront the Zionist intransigence." He noted that the occupation of Iraq is a Zionist plot. "The occupation of Iraq" the President added "is a Zionist conspiracy. Whatever reforms Israel is weaving for the Middle East is an overt challenge to the Arab nation." "Reforms only come from inside and with an Arab and Islamic will. Political situations cannot be reformed from outside either from the Congress or from elsewhere. And we do not accept foreign pressures whatever they are" the President added.

11. Al-Thawra (03/24) published another statement by the Joint Meeting of the Shura Council and Parliament; the Yemeni Cabinet; the Committee of Yemeni Scholars (Ulama); and the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate. The statements condemned very strongly the assassination of Yassin. The statement by the Shura Council and the Parliament urged the Palestinians to unite and "enhance resistance by all possible means." The statement requested all Arab and Muslim countries that have "direct or indirect relations with the Zionist entity to reconsider these relations." The statement charged the U.S. Administration as "fully responsible for the acts of terror committed by the Zionist entity against the people of Palestine since it is the strategic ally of Israel and number one supporter." The Cabinet called on the international community, the U.N. and the Quartet to condemn the assassination; "to put a limit to the Zionist state terrorism and to impose sanctions on Israel." The Ulama Committee called on the Arab and Muslim countries to boycott the Israeli products and the products of companies that support Israel. It called on the Arab and Muslim states that have economic and diplomatic relations with Israel "to break" these relations.

12. Anti-American independent Al-Balagh weekly (03/23) published an op-ed titled "Down with terrorist Sharon . Down with terrorist Bush." The op-ed blamed the U.S. position toward Palestine. It criticized Bush's "logic" that considers "the disabled Hamas leader as a terrorist, while Sharon for all his crimes, is seen by Bush as a man of peace." The paper added that Sharon and Bush are "the real terrorists."

13. COMMENT: While the universal condemnation of the assassination by both government and opposition forces as reflected in the above statements seems to reflect the general public sentiment in the country, the peaceful and almost toned-down nature of the demonstrations could be an indication that the Yemeni reaction may remain in the realm of rhetoric. Additionally, the government's obvious hand in organizing the largest demonstration seems to suggest that the authorities were acting preemptively to give the public a chance to blow off steam and thus avoid more serious action. The general condemnation of the United States as an accomplice in the act is not new, neither is it surprising given the fact that the United States is always blamed for not restraining Israel.

HULL